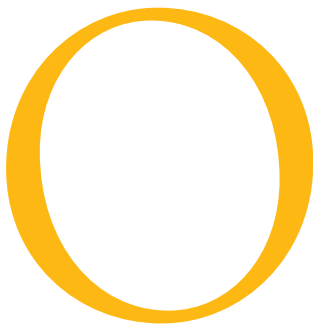


# Argentina to Texas: The Value of Exchange

by TIM R. SAMPLES



**ORIGINALLY FROM** Córdoba, Argentina, Daniel Ryan is now a promising doctoral candidate in UT's Department of Government. Before he had ever heard of a Longhorn, he earned a spot as a delegate in the Fundación Universitaria Rio de la Plata (FURP) program in the U.S. It was through this program that Daniel received

his introduction to Texas and learned about the university's strength in Latin American studies. When it came time to pick a doctoral program, UT was his first choice. Daniel is one of many Argentines who have come to UT as a FURP delegate through an annual program that allows young professionals from Argentina who are interested in the U.S. to take part in a month-long professional and cultural exchange.

Based in Argentina, the FURP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that was founded in 1970. Each year, the FURP sends a group of young Argentine professionals with leadership potential to the U.S. to gain a greater understanding of America's political, economic, social, and cultural realities. More than a month long, the program begins in Austin and ends in Washington, D.C., with visits to Philadelphia and New York City. For the individuals in the FURP delegation, the program begins long before they set foot in the Austin-Bergstrom Airport. With a two-month evaluation process that includes an exam, a series of interviews, participation in a national seminar, presentations at a colloquium, and a final selection, each delegate has earned his or her place.

Geographic and professional diversity are important factors in selecting the group. The 2009 delegation represented nine of Argentina's twenty-three provinces and a wide range of fields. Some delegates are elected officials or political advisers; others work in journalism, academia, business, or law. The delegation also represents a broad ideological spectrum within Argentina.



The Argentine FURPS gather in front of the Texas Capitol following their meeting with the Texas Secretary of State, Hope Andrade. Tim Samples is center, in striped tie.

As our resident Argentine at LLILAS, Paola Bueché, the coordinator for visiting scholars, is invaluable to the program. Paola coordinates logistics for the group, which is no small task. In scheduling the itinerary, we strive to present a balanced and realistic spectrum of American institutions and culture. Thanks to the remarkable resources at our disposal—at LLILAS, at the university, and around Austin—the itinerary is as diverse as it is busy. The only theme common to all our activities is the generosity of our participants, the people who share their time and insights with the delegation.

A typical day for the FURP delegation in Austin begins with an early breakfast at the hotel. Before

they board the vans, they are probably asking themselves how coffee could be so bad in such a prosperous country. But soon they are arriving at LLILAS for a talk with Dr. Nicolas Shumway, Professor of Spanish Language and Literature and author of *The Invention of Argentina*, to discuss Argentine history and how it weighs on modern Argentine culture. These discussions often include an exchange of views about similar topics as they relate to U.S. culture. Meetings with Professor Shumway are memorable for many of the delegates. One of them pulled me aside after the discussion and told me that he wished someday to be “the Shumway of Argentina—an expert on all things American.”

Next, the group is hosted at the U.S. District Court by Magistrate Judge Andrew Austin. After meeting with Judge Austin, the group observes a detention hearing for a man indicted for federal drug conspiracy. Then the group hustles down Congress Avenue to visit the headquarters of the Republican Party of Texas. Once there, the group learns about GOP principles and strategy from Executive Director Eric Opiela.

Back at LLILAS, the group gets a perspective on entrepreneurship in Austin from Clayton Christopher, founder of Sweet Leaf Tea, and samples the company’s products. Then we fight for a parking space near the Capitol—

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the legislature is in session—and meet with Representative Patrick Rose. He poses several questions to the group before discussing his vision for Democrats in Texas. Then it's back to LLILAS for coffee and an informal talk with a Marine captain about his experience in Iraq.

Cultural activities include many Austin landmarks, from the Blanton Museum of Art to the Broken Spoke, a two-step dance hall. In what was probably the group's favorite cultural event, we had a very memorable barbecue with the Brown family who hosted us at their ranch near the town of Lexington, Texas (population 1,178). The group was consistently impressed by the hospitality, openness, and interest in Argentina that they found in Texans during the program. Many of the delegates reported that their perceptions of Texans were fundamentally changed for the better during the course of the trip.

Many international programs like this begin and end in Washington, D.C., or New York City. This makes sense for a short program, but it highlights a distinctive strength of the FURP program in the U.S., which is divided between Austin, D.C., and Philadelphia. The Austin segment of the program makes up the first half of the overall itinerary.

I think Austin might just be the best place in the United States to begin this program. For one, Austin itself is a first-rate American city with friendly people and an innovative municipal government. Austin is a hub of political and cultural diversity, yet it also has a strong local identity. The spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship is also alive and well here, from technology startups to the many small businesses for which Austin is known.

Second, there is Texas. As a living example of American federalism, Texas is a vivid

illustration of the aspirations, power, and identity of one state. Texas history and politics give rise to provocative questions and debate. The Texas experience also gives the delegates a point of comparison with the other examples of American culture they find during the rest of their trip.

Third, and no less important, are the combined resources of UT and LLILAS. Visiting the premier university for Latin American studies in the U.S., with the Benson Collection and an incredible array of researchers, is a great opportunity for the delegates. Also, as a top-notch public school, UT Austin itself is a fine example of American higher education that the delegates experience from day one.

Before I was ever involved with the FURP program, I had lived in Argentina on a couple of occasions. As an undergraduate, I worked at the *Buenos Aires Herald*; a few years later, I worked at a law firm in Córdoba. So I never imagined that many of my most meaningful exchanges with Argentines would take place in Austin, Texas. But, in fact, they have. Being with the group as they discover, debate, and experience Texas, Austin, and the U.S. has been interesting and meaningful. Their observations and reactions often force me to reevaluate my understanding of my own country. At the same time, I gain insights about the way that Argentines feel and think about the U.S. and themselves.

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## LLILAS CONFERENCES

### Fall 2008

Making Race, Making Health: Historical Approaches to Race, Medicine, and Public Health

Olmec: The Origins of Ancient Mexican Civilization

### Spring 2009

Shared Visions for Cuba-U.S. Relations

The 2009 XXIX ILASSA Student Conference

Abriendo Brecha VI: Activist Scholarship Conference

The 2009 Lozano Long Conference: Contested Modernities: Indigenous and Afro-descendant Experiences in Latin America

Representations of Violence in Latin America

The Origins, Implementation, and Spread of Conditional Cash Transfer Programs in Latin America